

UNAMA**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communications

**Press Release**<http://unama.unmissions.org>

MORE EFFECTIVE AND TRANSPARENT MEANS OF RESOLVING DISPUTES OVER WATER-RIGHTS KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH AND AVOIDING CONFLICT, ACCORDING TO NEW UNAMA REPORT

KABUL, 23 October 2016 - The demand for water to support agricultural development in Afghanistan, which has been badly affected by conflict, deteriorating infrastructure and drought, often results in high-stakes water-right disputes, according to a new UNAMA report.

'Water Rights: An Assessment of Afghanistan's Legal Framework Governing Water for Agriculture' outlines the importance of water to the country's economy.

Many rural communities depend on reliable access to water sources to grow the crops and nourish the livestock on which their lives and livelihoods depend. Almost 80 per cent of Afghans derive their livelihood from the agricultural sector.

"As this report clearly outlines, the stakes involved in water disputes are high," said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA. "Resolving these disputes peacefully is of critical importance."

In Afghanistan, formal and informal means are used to resolve water-related disputes. These means include the 2009 Water Law, along with traditional customs and practices associated with the longstanding authority and community respect for water masters, or *mirabs*.

The UNAMA report documents the results of a field study designed to assess the effectiveness of dispute-resolution mechanisms. The report also provides practical recommendations to facilitate the resolution of disputes without escalation to violence.

One key finding of the report is that, notwithstanding the Water Law's comprehensive regulatory scheme, water users continue to rely predominately on local water masters to resolve disputes. This is largely due to gaps in the Water Law's scope and associated administrative structure.

Michael E. Hartmann, Director of UNAMA's Rule of Law Unit, stated that this finding "confirms that the challenge is not with the law as written but, rather, with the law as implemented," and that "UNAMA will continue to assist in achieving broader implementation of the Water Law."

The full report is available on UNAMA's website: <http://unama.unmissions.org/water-rights>

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